

'The Breeze' radio network plays it cool

Mellow format tailored for upscale listener

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Jack Moore knows how to sell musical relaxation. He did it from 1961 to 1969, when he owned radio station WAYL-FM and introduced "beautiful music" to the Twin Cities radio scene.

He did it again from 1977 to 1983, when he owned KTWN-FM and brought light jazz to local airwaves.

Now, Moore is trying to market his programming ideas from coast to coast.

In September, Moore and several partners started "The Breeze," a radio network distributed by satellite from studios in Minneapolis. Affiliate radio stations simply set up a satellite dish to receive the signal; they then can broadcast The Breeze up to 24 hours a day, allowing them to operate without disc jockeys or announcers.

The Breeze, heard locally on KSNE 1280-AM, has grown from a single station in Spokane, Wash., to a network of 20 affiliates stretching from Vermont to Arizona. Moore confidently predicts The Breeze will be operating at a profit by the end of this year and will quadruple in size



Neale Van Ness/Staff Photographer

Jack Moore and several partners started "The Breeze," a radio network distributed by satellite from studios in Min-

neapolis. Affiliate stations can broadcast "The Breeze" 24 hours a day eliminating the need for disc jockeys.

Music/ Network tries to reach upscale 'New Age' listener

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to 80 affiliates by the middle of 1989.

Moore is selling New Age music, a hybrid between soft rock and soft jazz popularized by the Windham Hill record label and by such artists as Al Jarreau, George Winston, Bob James and Andreas Volleweider.

Some critics dismiss New Age as Yuppie elevator music, the 1980s equivalent of Mantovani and other pop arrangers who were topping the charts two decades ago.

Moore stoutly defends New Age, citing its roots in jazz and rock, two of the nation's most popular and enduring sounds. The Breeze, he adds, is a proven concept.

"We ran this format for five years on KTWN," Moore states. "The audience reaction (from cities with radio stations carrying The Breeze) is *deja vu* for us."

According to Moore, New Age music is an advertiser's dream come true. The audience is centered on high-income adults ages 25 to 45 who want to escape the loud, frantic beat of rock and roll without sinking into the syrupy strings of beautiful music.

Moore started The Breeze to capitalize on New Age's increasing popularity in record stores and on the concert circuit. But Moore isn't alone in his insight: Another satellite New Age radio network called The Wave went on the air just 20 days after The Breeze was born.

Although definitive ratings reports aren't in yet, both networks claim listeners and advertisers are lending an ear. That may not be enough, however, to insure The Breeze's long-term survival.

K-Twin Communications Inc., Moore's company, still has to overcome several obstacles, such as convincing advertisers The Breeze reaches a worthwhile audience and that New Age music isn't a passing fad. Also, Moore faces a much bigger competitor who has signed up affiliates in several key markets.

Satellite Music Network Inc. of Dallas distributes eight different programming formats, including The Wave, to almost 1,000 radio stations.

"You know what happens when a wave comes up over a breeze," jokes James Rupp, president of Midwest Communications Inc. in Minneapolis. Midwest, which owns WCCO television and radio, was a founding partner of Satellite Music Network and owns 21 percent of the company.

The Wave has signed up eight affiliates, and only six of them are using The Wave's programming on a 24-hour basis. But the six active affiliates are in major markets, including Los Angeles, Chicago, Cleveland and Detroit. The Breeze hasn't yet penetrated any of the nation's 10 largest metropolitan areas, the most desirable markets for advertisers buying air time on a national broadcast network. The largest markets carrying The Breeze so far are Minneapolis-St. Paul and St. Louis.

Satellite Music Network is testing a radical idea with The Wave: a radio network with no announcers. The only voices, other than news and local commercials, are taped station-identification messages.

Robert Hall, director of The Wave network, says the sophisticated audience attracted to New Age music regards disc jockeys as "inarticulate loud-mouths who talk all the time and say nothing." Listeners who want to know song titles are told to call a toll-free number for information.

The differences between The Wave and The Breeze are more style than content. Both networks focus on the same playlist of New Age artists, who aren't well known. The lack of clearly identifiable big names — an equivalent, for example, of Michael Jackson in rock or Barbra Streisand in pop — causes some radio programmers to look skeptically at New Age.

Satellite Music Network's major competitor, Transtar Radio Network, considered and rejected the idea of developing a New Age service. Transtar has more than 1,000 affiliates receiving eight separate formats.

"We don't see it, at this time anyway, being an expanding market," says Terry Robinson, chairman of Star Group Communications Inc. of Colorado Springs,

Colo., which owns Transtar. Star Group also owns radio stations, including KMGK-FM in the Twin Cities, known as KTWN until Star Group purchased the station from Moore and his partners five years ago.

Gary Fries, president of Transtar, says New Age music needs to be tailored to individual broadcast markets, making a nationwide satellite service unworkable.

"Our feeling is, it doesn't have legs — long-term staying power," Fries declares. He compares the recent surge of interest in New Age music to the disco craze.

KTWN, the prototype for The Breeze, was never a ratings smash, but the station did well among listener groups sought by advertisers. In the spring of 1983, for example, KTWN drew 10 percent of all listeners from ages 25 to 49 between 6 a.m. and midnight. On Saturdays from 7 p.m. to midnight, KTWN attracted 26 percent of men between ages 18 and 34.

"Frankly, I just decided to play what I like," Moore says of his days at KTWN. "You could tune in and not be quite sure what you were going to hear."

However, listeners to KTWN — and now to The Breeze — can be sure what they won't hear. Moore stays away from music with a frantic pace or hard edges.

A typical New Age album cut features rich instrumentals, often including synthesizers, and jazz-oriented vocals. The sound is deliberately mellow, an effort to provide audio relaxation without drifting into musical boredom.

Moore says New Age appeals to the 25-to-45-year-old age group because it is the first type of music — other than rock — produced by that group's peers. There is no generally accepted definition of New Age music, however, and both The Breeze and The Wave occasionally stray from mainstream New Age selections to include jazz and rock.

For radio stations eager to offer a New Age format, The Breeze and The Wave provide music without requiring owners to invest in a record library or pay disc jockeys.

Satellite receiving equipment for The Breeze and similar services

from Transtar or Satellite Music Network costs \$5,000 to \$20,000. Stations in major markets receive The Breeze for free, in exchange for surrendering two minutes every hour for network commercials. Stations in smaller markets pay a monthly affiliation fee of \$500, which will increase to \$1,000 in May.

The Breeze has to survive on revenue from its two minutes of advertising time every hour. Most of the spots sold by the network have been purchased by record companies that are promoting New Age music. But Moore says he hopes to start signing up other advertisers, such as hotels and airlines that want to reach The Breeze's well-to-do listeners.

Using pre-recorded station-identification messages, The Breeze is localized for each market. It transmits an inaudible signal several times an hour that triggers the taped message. Each disc jockey on The Breeze tapes the station-identification messages, so that listeners in places such as Steamboat Springs, Colo., and Greenville, N.C., don't realize they are listening to a live voice in Minneapolis one moment and a taped voice from their local station the next.

John Rook, general manager of KEYF-FM in Spokane, says no listener who has called his station realizes The Breeze programming isn't local.

Rook, the first affiliate back in September, is extremely happy with The Breeze. He says advertising sales in February were up 74 percent from a year earlier, when the station was broadcasting a middle-of-the-road adult format from Transtar.

"We're the new guiding light and darling of the market," Rook declares.

Brian Short, one of the owners of KSNE in Minneapolis, hasn't gotten as big a response. Listeners like The Breeze, according to Short, but advertisers haven't given the station any new business since The Breeze went on the air in late November.

"We're very disappointed with that, frankly," Short says.

Still, Short is pleased with

KSNE's new format and calls Moore "a programming genius."

The Breeze is signing up affiliates in large part on Moore's reputation and the performance of KTWN five years ago.

Moore, 65, has spent more than 30 years in Twin Cities radio. He started with the now-defunct WBPC-AM in the 1950s, working as a salesman, news director and announcer at various times.

In 1961, Moore founded WAYL-FM, the Twin Cities' first beautiful music station. He sold WAYL in 1969 and started a station in Cambridge, Minn., then sold that station and bought KTWN in 1977.

Moore and his partners put KTWN on the radio map. The group, which bought the station for \$650,000, was able to sell it six years later for \$3.8 million.

After selling KTWN, Moore dabbled in video, taping concerts and producing a New Age music video

service that appeared on local cable television systems.

Moore found new partners to launch The Breeze last year. Group members raised \$2 million among themselves and now are forming a limited partnership to raise an additional \$2 million. Moore owns 30 percent of K-Twin Communications; Dr. Alexander Levitan, a Fridley physician, owns another 30 percent; Larry Kitts, a partner in an Edina insurance agency, owns 20 percent; and the remaining 20 percent is spread among K-Twin employees and small investors.

Moore isn't stopping with a radio network. He is continuing to develop video projects and is exploring the idea of selling The Breeze as background music in shopping malls and offices. Also, New Age pianist Scott Cossu is starting a three-hour Sunday morning music program on The Breeze in May that Moore will sell to non-affiliated radio stations.